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Azaleas

The New and the Old

By F. F. ROCKWELL

Photographed in Natural Color by W. O. Floing

IT IS easy to understand why the azaleas should possess the strong appeal they do. In brilliancy, range of coloring and variety of both plant and flower forms they far surpass any other shrubs we have; their period of flowering, beginning with the golden-bellied forsythias, extends from March or early April to July; the foliage is attractive even when the plants are not in bloom; some varieties color beautifully in the fall; others are evergreen; and a number are deliciously fragrant. Add to all this the facts that they are easy to grow, provided only a few fundamental but simple requirements are met, and that they are comparatively free from insect and disease troubles, and it is readily seen why they become great favorites with all who make their acquaintance.

If azaleas have so much to recommend them, why are they not to be found in every garden? The reasons are two: For a long time their culture was not so well understood as it is now. The impression that they are difficult to grow became widespread, and it has taken the gardening public some time to learn that their requirements are not difficult, but merely different, as compared to the run of ornamental shrubs; in fact, they are very much more easily grown than most garden roses. The other reason is that formerly practically all our azaleas, both for florists' forcing and for outdoor planting, were imported from Holland and Belgium, and when the Federal plant quarantine was put into effect there was practically no commercial production of these plants in America. Not only was it necessary for American nurserymen—and even for the Dutch growers who came here—to experiment



Individual flowers of some of the gorgeous new Kaempferi Kurume hybrids, excellent for forcing and fairly hardy out-of-doors. The flowers in panel are a typical Kurume (left) and a Kaempferi (right), the parents of this new race.



New York would be sure to fail, sooner or later, in New England. In speaking of hardy sorts in the following paragraphs, reference is made to those which are surely hardy and which may be planted in New England and other Northern sections. Those referred to as half-hardy may be safely used in the latitude of New York and Cleveland if placed in suitable locations and given reasonable care in the way of protection—and they richly reward the slight additional care demanded.

The most striking results yet attained in azalea hybridizing in America are the new types developed by John Baardse. These are, for the most part, crosses of the torch azalea (*Azalea kaempferi*) and various Kurume varieties.

Kaempferi is a well-known old reliable, absolutely hardy, and a tall, strong grower, with flaming orange-red blossoms completely covering the plant in early May.

The Kurumes are of uncertain origin, taking their name from the Japanese city where they were long cultivated before being introduced to America by "Chinese" Wilson, to whom we are indebted for so many garden treasures from the Orient. The Kurumes offer a marvelous variety of colors and flower forms, and, though they have been used to a considerable extent for outdoor planting and are well worth trying, they can be classed, at best, as but half-hardy. Numerous named varieties, now quite generally available, include Apple Blossom, a charming light pink and white; Coral Bells, with small, semidouble coral-pink flowers; Snow, with very large pure white flowers; Salmon Beauty, brilliant salmon, and Christmas Cheer, a real red.

(Continued on Page 170)



Left—Dorothy Bobbink, apple-blossom pink, one of the most charming of the Baardse hybrids. Right—Mr. John Baardse, a deep pink. Above—Christmas Cheer, one of the popular Kurumes.

Louise, one of the Kaempferi malcata hybrids, shown for the first time this spring at the New York and Philadelphia flower shows, where they won a gold medal and two first prizes. Being the hardiest of the large-flowered hybrids, they are especially valuable for the outdoors.

and work out methods of propagation adapted to American conditions, but also it required time to work up propagating stocks. Even after this had been done, the florists had first call, for the azalea has always been popular as a plant for forcing, and many of the outdoor varieties are used for this purpose. It is only within the past year or two that they have again been generally available to the home gardener. Now, however, we have really entered a period of mass production of these beautiful flowers. The other day I saw in a single house 35,000 young plants, and many times this number, in plants of all sizes, in four Eastern nurseries visited. The day for American-grown azaleas for everyone who wants them is here.

Not only shall we have American-grown but also American-bred azaleas. In every case when the commercial production of flowers for American gardens has been shifted here from overseas, the development of new varieties in this country has followed. The azalea is no exception to this general rule.

for growing out-of-doors, there has not been available for this purpose the full range of colors and flowers of the size that are found in the tenderer sorts. Plant breeders recognized the fact that there was an opportunity for developing new hardy hybrids with these desirable qualities. In passing, it may be well to explain that "hardy" is a relative term. Azaleas, more than most shrubs, show relative degrees of hardiness. Sorts hardy at the latitude of Philadelphia are planted with risk as much farther north as New York; some that are safe at

Though there has been, for many years, a number of very satisfactory azaleas

Snow, with immense pure white flowers, and (right) a deep shell-pink, hybrids of Kurume *ledifolia* (*indica*) *alba*.



Azaleas

(Continued from other side)

From his crosses of *kaempferi* and *kurumes*, and some other sorts, such as the pure white-flowered *ledifolia alba*, Mr. Baardse has obtained a new type with the brilliancy and variety of the latter and much of the hardiness of the former. These have been tested out for a number of years and the hardiest are being propagated for outdoor planting.

The unfamiliar and, in some cases, quite outlandish names of these azaleas are always confusing to the layman. It makes it somewhat easier to think of them as two distinct groups, of half a dozen or so each, the first including the Oriental sorts from Japan, China, Korea and Manchuria, and the second composed of our native species.

It is among the first group that the earliest-flowering kinds are to be found. Starting the show, early in April or even in late March, is the Mongolian azalea (*A. mucronulatum*), long known but only recently propagated sufficiently to be generally available. Its charming lavender-pink flowers appear at the same time as the golden blooms of the forsythia, with which it makes a wonderful color combination in the bare spring garden. Because of its extreme earliness this should find a place in every garden. It is exceptional in that it will grow in rather dry, even gravelly, soil.

Groups

FOLLOWING this, in late April or early May, the Korean azalea (*A. poukhanensis*), of dwarf shrubby habit, bears its very fragrant, rosy-purple flowers, followed by attractive foliage which colors beautifully toward fall.

Somewhat later is the rose azalea (*A. rhombica*), growing larger and with bright rose flowers. In late May comes the royal azalea (*A. schlippenbachii*)—pronounced with a hard, long *e*, as in sneezing), bearing clusters of pale rose flowers with reddish spots on the upper petals.

Following this early group, and extending the flowering season well into June, come several Japanese and one Chinese variety.

Best known of these, and one of the most widely planted of all azaleas, is *amoena*, an evergreen Japanese sort of dwarf-shrubby growth. The bright, rosy-purplish flowers are borne in great masses. There are a number of forms and varieties of *amoena*; *hinodegiri*, bright scarlet, and *superba*, deep rosy purple, with "hose-in-hose" or double flowers, one set within the other, being two of the best of these evergreen sorts.

The torch or scarlet azalea (*A. kaempferi*), another of the most popular and reliable sorts, forms a tall bush of vigorous growth which is literally smothered with the mass of fiery red-orange blooms.

The true *A. japonica*, or Japanese azalea, is hardy at Boston, though many less hardy hybrid forms have been sold under this name; if you buy it, be sure you are getting the original species. It is among the most showy of all; the large flowers are of orange, red and yellow shades, and deliciously fragrant. Not quite so hardy, but still planted quite generally in New England, is the Chinese azalea (*A. mollis*), even more glorious, especially when used in masses, than the Japanese azalea. Though deciduous, the foliage is produced with the flowers, setting off fully the marvelous shades of yellow, orange, lemon, salmon and terra cotta. It is unexcelled for planting in front of rhododendrons or evergreens, which give the desired protection. A cross between the two above types (*A. mollis* and *A. japonica*) is *Louisa Hunnewell*, perfectly hardy in Massachusetts, and awarded a gold medal by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

It has immense flowers of orange yellow, occasionally with a salmon tint—a splendid acquisition and a variety which should be used in all Northern gardens.

Types

TWO half-hardy groups which in their many-named varieties offer an almost unlimited range of colors are *A. pontica*—which in former days we knew as the hardy Ghent azaleas—and hybrids of these and of *A. mollis*.

Most rock-hardy of all the azaleas, and therefore best both for naturalizing and for planting where there may be any doubt as to conditions being unfavorable, are our own beautiful but altogether too little appreciated native azaleas. They require an acid or "rhododendron" soil—

Garden Tragedy

By CHESLA C. SHERLOCK

TO GO into the garden and bend the knee in the tasks at hand is not quite enough. I count it tragedy, indeed, when we walk down the garden paths or set our hands to some task with plant or shrub, to linger in spirit over the desk in some distant office, to lift our ears for the roar of busy looms, or to listen for the screech of the pavement devils. To be in the garden with our thoughts elsewhere is to miss the real harvest of these pains we take.

Unless the garden capture us in spirit as well as in body, we shall never know the peace and understanding it silently offers. When we deny it this, we are only half gardeners. And the pity of it is that it is only by the lesser half—the stunted side of our natures—that we come into the garden at all.

in this respect, in fact, are somewhat more particular than most of the horticultural sorts—but, aside from that, no more care than any common shrub. Though not equaling in range of coloring the exotic sorts, they present a fairly wide choice of material and bloom from April to July.

Earliest to flower is the dainty rose-flowered rhodora (*A. rhodora canadensis*). But a frail shrub, usually less than three feet high, it smiles at low temperatures. I have found it in masses several hundred miles north of Montreal. Excellent for naturalizing in moist, shady locations.

Somewhat later, and known to everyone who has roamed the spring countryside, is the pinxterbloom (*A. nudiflora*), four to eight feet, with delicate fragrant pink flowers before the foliage develops. Considerably taller, eight to fifteen feet, and of loose Japanesque habit, is the pink-shell azalea (*A. vaseyi*), with pure, pink starry blossoms before the leaves; it is especially effective, in single plants or small groups, near water; the foliage colors finely in the fall. The Piedmont or Southern azalea (*A. canescens*) is hardy much farther north than the Carolinas, where it grows naturally, but not so absolutely hardy as the very similar downy

pinxterbloom (*A. rosea*), which grows farther north than any except rhodora.

The sweet azalea (*A. arborescens*) has very fragrant white flowers, with a trace of pink; it is the one for high ground, hillsides and banks, being in this respect the opposite of the swamp azalea (*A. viscosa*), a tall, thin-growing species with peculiarly sticky but tropically fragrant white or faintly flushed blooms. Both of these are very late, viscous bringing the azalea season to a close, usually in July.

Nature is almost always a compensator, and in the case of our native azaleas she has added to the moderate-toned white, pink and rose flowered sorts above, one which is not only the most brilliant colored American shrub but one of the most dazzling of any in the world. This is the flame azalea (*A. calendulacea*—formerly *lutea*), which comes from the Appalachian range; it is hardy, vigorous, growing five to ten feet tall, and its name well describes the flamelike effect of the great clusters of yellow-orange and orange-scarlet flowers. It blooms at the height of the azalea season, in late May and early June.

Most azaleas grow naturally in shaded or semishaded positions, protected from the wind, and where there is a gradual accumulation of leaves and twigs from their own growth and from neighboring hardwood trees. In the acid leaf mold thus formed the fibrous mass of azalea roots find both moisture and sufficient nourishment for their slow growth.

Soil Requirements

IN USING azaleas in our gardens we should try to duplicate these conditions as nearly as we can. Plant, if possible, where evergreens, a hedge, or shrubbery planting or a building will afford protection from north and northeast winds. Partial shade from direct winter sunshine is also desirable. This may be provided, where necessary, by cut evergreen or oak boughs stuck in among the plants just before the ground freezes. If the soil is decidedly alkaline in reaction—that is, well supplied with lime, either naturally or from previous applications—a generous-sized hole for each plant, or better, an entire bed, where a group planting is to be made, should be dug out to a depth of eighteen to twenty-four inches and filled in with a mixture of light soil, with a third to a half of natural hardwoods or log peat, or granulated peat moss, added. If only heavy soil is available add a generous proportion of sand or fine gravel. In most garden soils, however, digging in the equivalent of a four-to-six-inch layer of leaf mold or peat moss will be sufficient preparation. The plants, which may be set out in August or early in the spring, should have the ball of roots soaked first in a pail or tub, and covered just over the top of the ball, ramming the soil in firmly around them. Never let the soil about the roots become dried out, particularly for the first twelve months after planting.

Mulching is one of the most essential points in azalea culture. Immediately after planting, and thereafter each spring, at least until the plants have become well established, apply four or five inches of coarse leaf mold or half-rotted evergreen needles, or half that thickness of peat moss. In late autumn mulch again, about twice as thickly. No fertilizers will be needed except an annual top-dressing of rotted stable or cow manure, or commercial shredded cattle manure, put on with the spring mulching. Aluminum sulphate, at the rate of two to three pounds to a hundred square feet, put on in advance of each mulching, will keep the soil sufficiently acid, if the mulching does not accomplish this. The mulch should never be removed, but left to decay.